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Regional Planning Agency Grades SoCal's Quality Of Life

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LOS ANGELES -- Southern California's quality of life received a D plus on a report card issued Thursday by a regional planning agency.

The seventh annual State of the Region report by the Southern California Association of Governments gave lower grades to air quality and housing than in last year's report, while grades for traffic, education, household income and public safety remained unchanged.

The region's personal income must increase in order for the problems to be solved, the group's executive director told the *Daily News*.

"Without an increase in wages and per capita income we're not going to have the resources to deal with these issues," Mark Pisano said.

Personal income in the region was unchanged in 2003, the year studied, despite an increase in jobs of 14,000, according to the report.

Air quality received a C minus after receiving a C in the report issued in 2004. Housing received a D, the lowest in the report's history. It received a D plus in the 2004 report.

Employment went from a B minus to a B. In both years, income received a C minus, mobility a D minus, education a D and safety a B.

One factor in keeping the region's income level from rising is that only 27 percent of the area's adults have a college degree, limiting the rest of the population's ability to get high-paying jobs, according to the report.

Meanwhile, well-paying manufacturing jobs have shifted to less-expensive areas and replaced with lower-paying service jobs, the report said.

With less wealth, residents have to travel to far-flung suburbs to be able to afford a home, which then worsens congestion and pollution, according to the report.

"How do you get out of this Catch-22?" Los Angeles County Supervisor Yvonne Brathwaite Burke asked the *Daily News*. "We need better schools (in urban areas) so people won't have to move so far away and housing people can afford so they don't have to move so far away." Association officials told the *Daily News* they are trying to tackle housing and related issues of traffic and air quality with the "2 percent strategy" - a planning vision adopted last year calling for more condominiums, town houses and denser development close to transit lines. The report covers Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, Riverside, Imperial and Ventura counties.